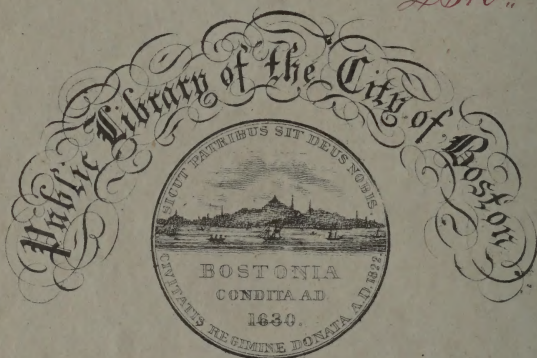




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THE HOUR OF PERIL.

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S E R M O N

DELIVERED IN

THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH IN ROXBURY,

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 1861.

BY REV. J. G. BARTHOLOMEW.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY ABEL TOMPKINS,

38 & 40 Cornhill.

1861.

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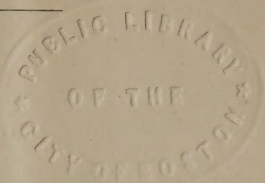




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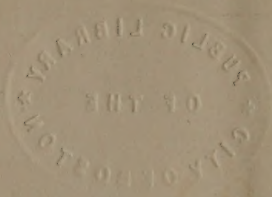
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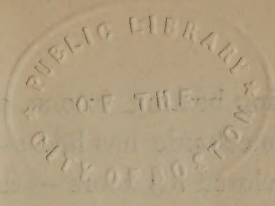
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## S E R M O N .

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1 Kings viii. 57.

“THE LORD OUR GOD BE WITH US, AS HE WAS WITH OUR FATHERS.”

THERE are occasions when events may be said to preach. Occasions when every topic seems unimportant except that which pertains to the things of the passing hour. Occasions when our hearts are stirred to their very depths, and our souls reach out for some response of sympathy. And at such a time the pulpit is untrue to its high commission if it fails to speak out with words of counsel or reproof. To-day I know the subject towards which your hearts are turning, and I feel it my duty to say something of the perils of the hour.

The week that has just drawn to a close, has been crowded with events of deepest importance to us all, because they affect the welfare of our common country, and involve the peace and safety of our homes. Never before since the days of Revolutionary memory and fame has there been a call to arms that has so thrilled the great heart of our people, swallowed up all party lines, and set the pulse of patriotic feel-

ing beating in one quick response like this. The mechanic has laid aside his tools — the trader has closed his doors — the farmer has left his peaceful home, and men of all professions have buckled on their armor for our country's defense. The old have felt the vigor of youth returning to their hearts, and the young have caught the spirit of patriotism from the excitement of parade. And we who have seen rank after rank of soldiery roll by, and watched the bristling bayonets hurrying on to their work of death, have learned for the first time what that excitement was that lit up the plains of Lexington and looked down from Bunker Hill. We have lived amid these sacred memories and have looked up from childhood at these monuments of victory — we have talked of the days that tried men's souls, and thought we had felt something of the spirit that braved the perils of '76, but they have never appeared to us, as they do to-day. Those times of trial have returned. We stand upon the verge of a great calamity whose dimension no man can tell, whose end no human eye can see; and it becomes us to look calmly at the dangers which surround us, while we pray that "the Lord our God may be with us as he was with our fathers."

The dark cloud that has so long been gathering on the Southern horizon is ready to burst upon us. Already it has let fall a few warning drops, bidding us prepare for the storm. It is terrible to think of the horrors of civil war with all its train of evils.



War under any circumstances is a terrible scourge, but doubly so when brother rises up against brother, and a common country bought at such a price as this, must be drenched in fraternal blood. It is something I had hoped and prayed might never come. But it has been forced upon us, and we must meet it. The blessings which have come down to us freighted with such sacred memories — blessings which our fathers wrung from the hands of tyrants — are not to be surrendered to the power of worse oppressors, while we have a voice to pray and an arm to strike. The power of this Republic has not faded away, and it must be used for the preservation of the Republic ; and woe be to him who stands in the way of the accomplishment of that holy purpose.

The causes which have led us on to this hour of peril we cannot well mistake. For more than half a century Slavery has been in the ascendancy, and our government has been virtually controlled by it. It is its nature to control — nay, its very life. It must either hold our free institutions in check, and blot out our Declaration of Independence, or must itself die. And with such a spirit, growing more bold and exacting year by year, it is not surprising that this attempt should now be made to give it absolute power and rule. The threats with which at first it forced itself upon us, were the same with which it has maintained its sway since. It seized upon the largest and most fertile territory embraced by the thirteen original States, and appropriated it

to its exclusive use, and has extended its dominion from time to time, by means which should have been regarded and treated as treason to our country. In 1820, it seized upon Missouri, and doomed it to oppression. It compelled us to take up arms against Mexico, in 1846, which cost America more than \$150,000,000, and 14,000 men, that it might reach out its iron arm and increase its cruel power. It forced the Fugitive Slave Law upon us, in 1850. It broke the Missouri Compromise in 1854. It sought to lock the lips of Sumner in 1856, and within a year has attempted to put down freedom of speech in sight of Faneuil Hall. This is the tyranny under which we have lived for the last fifty years, and which now would put its foot upon our necks. It has disregarded the Constitution under which we profess to live, and mocked our Declaration of Independence in every possible way. It has denied the right of protection to our citizens on its soil, and by mobs and duels has defied our government to maintain the privileges which belong to every freeman. And in the midst of all this aggression it has all along been crying that we have abused and wronged it. Having controlled the government, perjured the Constitution, and taken advantage of temporary authority to augment and fortify its wicked institutions, it has still claimed to be the victim of constant persecution. Every trouble that has arisen from the inharmony of its own system, has been a thrust from the North. Every loss it



has sustained from the weakness and imperfection of its own organization, has been an evidence of Northern infidelity. Every defeat and disappointment which it has met, and which are natural enough from such a course as the Slave power has pursued, has shown the treachery of the North.

And so it has railed at freedom for the results of its own laws and institutions. Civil war has really existed in our country in some of its features for more than half a century. From no nation on the earth would the North have borne so much as it has borne from the South. When I think of the insults, and threats and aggressions which it has heaped upon us from year to year, I can but wonder that we have been at peace so long. Nor have we been alone in this. There are multitudes of true and loyal souls scattered all over the South that have been galling under its yoke. It has long been a matter of wonder to me how northern men could even apologise for this great oppression. And this too while it has been living upon us like a leech. Had we been dependent upon slavery for our wealth or strength, I can see how we could have permitted its rule. But we owe nothing of this kind to the South. Our wealth and greatness, our free institutions and abundant prosperity are the fruit of our own industry and prudence, and may be said to have grown up in spite of this great hindrance. We are rich to-day because of our *freedom*, and are now in peril because of *slavery*.

It is surprising how blind we have been. So long as the Slave Power only denied the negro his rights we could rest in peace. We did not see that as intelligence increased, a system which is dependent upon ignorance for its life, would proportionally grow weak, and to sustain itself must crush out freedom even here. And so we have lived upon this crater unmindful of the fire that was smouldering beneath us, and that would one day burst into a flame. We did not see that when the Slave Power took away the freedom of the blacks, it would strike a blow at our freedom whenever it felt that we stood in its way. But it was so. It would strike down a Sumner, or kill a Lovejoy as soon as it would a fugitive slave, if it thought either hindered its power. What has it not done in the past? Its bloody history is too awful to repeat. It would take away the schools of Ohio and Illinois, as soon as it would keep the children of the slave in ignorance if its interests demanded it. There is nothing too enormous for despotism to do, if it feels that its power is growing weak. It drank the blood of Roman slaughter and revelled amidst the tortures of the cruel Inquisition. It beheaded John the Baptist to please a silly maid, and mocked the agony of a dying Christ. And this despotism of America is capable of doing all that it has done elsewhere. Despotism and Freedom can never live together, and now it is time for men to choose between them, for in this contest is to be decided which shall rule.



An able writer has said that "God marks the great seasons of the world's history, by a mighty clock. Every nation has a huge dial-plate, and behind it are the works, and below it is the pendulum, and every now and then its hands mark a new hour. Our Revolution was such a period. That is the glory of it. The English government had oppressed our fathers. It tried to break their spirits. It was for several years a dark time like the season before sunrise. But the old time-piece kept ticking, ticking—the wheels kept playing calmly till about 1775, there was a strange stir and busy clatter inside the case. The people could not bear any more. A sixtieth minute came, and all of a sudden the clock struck. The world heard the battle of Bunker Hill—*one*; the Declaration of Independence—*two*; the surrender of Burgoyne—*three*; the siege of Yorktown—*four*; the treaty of Paris—*five*; the inauguration of Washington—*six*; and then it was sunrise, and we stood up in the forenoon of a glorious day." Peacefully and calmly that day has passed on, and great works have been accomplished in it. But darkness began to gather upon our Southern borders many years ago, and it has seemed to grow darker and darker every year, till now from Baltimore and Sumter the old clock has given warning that it will soon strike again. A new day of freedom will soon be counted off from the great belfry of the heavens, for I have faith to believe that God means *Freedom*, and not despotism by these terrible events.

My friends, we stand upon the threshold of a siege that will test our principles of freedom clear down to the bottom of our hearts. It is no time to hesitate and doubt the issue. God is speaking to you and me by every event of the hour. We must take sides in the contest; and he who, in this time of peril is a traitor to his country's freedom, is a traitor to the God of our fathers. I hate war in all its forms, and especially a civil war, because it is a bloody quarrel among brethren. A war of conquest — a war of oppression — a war for greater wealth or power, is the greatest wickedness that God ever permitted on the earth. But when a people stand up in defence of their country and their homes — when after patient endurance of insult and injury, despotism takes up the weapons of war, and strikes a blow at our freedom and our children's freedom, defence is the only alternative. And he ought to be a slave who will refuse at such a time, to guard and maintain so precious a boon. In an hour like this there is nothing left but force, and every man and woman ought to be willing and ready for any sacrifice and trial that the contest may demand. It is a struggle which involves our honor and our religion, and we must remember that we are contending not for ourselves alone. "What," asks Dr. Chapin, "made our revolution legitimate? What were the central ideas that throbbed in the breasts of its heroes and martyrs? Take down the old muskets, bent in the hot encounter and printed with many a



death gripe ; take down the old uniforms, clipped by Hessian sabers, and torn by British bullets ; take down the dusty muster-rolls, scrawled with those venerable names — names that now are graven on the stone, names that are buried in the sod ; names that have gone up to immortality — and ask for what was that great struggle ?” And the answer comes from all our free and glorious institutions — from all our happiness and prosperity in the past, *to secure liberty to us and our children forever.* Then turn again in this time of peril, and ask *what we have to do ?* and all the heavens above beam with the radiant faces of those whose ashes are sleeping in our soil, and the answer comes in mingled accents from ten thousand angel tongues — STAND BY IT FOREVER. God grant that we may hear and heed it.

Had our government taken up arms to invade the rights of the South — had the call been for armed men to tear down their institutions, or take away their wealth I should have felt that it was a sin not to condemn and scorn it. But this call involves but a single question — *have we a government, or does anarchy reign ?* And that appeal stirs all the Puritan blood in our veins, and the slumbering fires of '76 are kindled to a flame. If civil war is a terrible thing, a mob and bludgeon civilization is not much to be preferred. The Slave Power seems to have adopted the sentiments of Milton's Satan, when he said, “Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.” It is time that we began to inquire in earnest wheth-

er we are entirely in the hands of such a power. When one after another our forts are snatched away, and mobs defy the government to control its affairs, it becomes every loyal citizen to stand up for the Constitution and the laws. I believe the Slave power knows it must die, but it is determined to go to its death through the blood of Northern freemen. Its alarm has been growing more intense from year to year, although it has sought to hide it under its bluster and pretense. It is afraid of its own slaves, and well it may be, for if they once begin to beat their shackles into swords, they will avenge themselves of their terrible wrongs. It is afraid of the shadow of its free white men, it has so trampled upon their rights. It is afraid of the insulted and injured North, because of the wrongs and wickedness which it knows we ought to repay. But it has taken courage at our calmness, and increased its insults ten fold of late. We have waited with a patience that should give us honor in the eyes of the civilized world. We have endured and suffered; but the storm grew worse and worse, and when we heard the rattling shot on Sumter's granite breast, our blood was stirred, and our patriotism rose up in defense. And that was what the South did not expect. They thought us cowards and so they dared us. They ought to have been wise enough to know that if once the hearts of this great North were touched, it would kindle a flame not easy to put out. But its bombastic defiance went too far, and it finds



itself to-day, face to face with freemen. I know it is a solemn hour. I feel that it is a sad and unusual thing for the pulpit to be compelled to give its counsel thus. But that religion which can look on calmly and see the priceless boon of freedom trampled under foot, and give no counsel for defense, is, to me, a worthless thing. Better, far better is it that you and I should fall by the sword to-morrow, than cowardly to shrink away from duty now, and make slaves of our children. The words of Patrick Henry are appropriate for us to-day :—"Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" and may that God who inspired the hearts of our fathers, in the day of trial, help us to give the emphatic answer—NO.

My heart is pained at the thought of the innocent multitude who must suffer in this conflict. When I think of the tearful wives and mothers, whose anguish only wives and mothers know — when I think of the little children who look up amidst this bristling armor with wonder and alarm, my sympathy and pity find no words. But when I think of that greater evil that is threatening not only these, but all generations to come — that would curse our country from sea to sea, I turn with gratitude and pride to those faithful husbands, sons, and brothers, who have gone out from our firesides to turn back this mighty evil or return upon their shields. "May the Lord our God be with them as he was with our fathers."

This is a terrible school, but we are learning valuable lessons in it. How that fire on Sumter burned away the party lines and badges of the North, and melted these million hearts into one. We know no party names to-day. The differences of feeling that have heretofore existed have been swallowed up and lost. Three months ago who would have thought that all these conflicts of opinion could have been so suddenly wiped out. The names of party leaders have been torn from our banners, and "the old flag of our Union" waves proudly over our heads. Under that sacred symbol all this great North have rallied at the cry "to arms," and the only purpose that throbs in these million hearts, is to protect it from the touch of traitors. We stand to-day a band of brothers in a sense we have never stood before. When a blow is aimed at our common mother's heart, we forget every thing but that we are children. And though it be the hands of brothers that have aimed the blow, we feel that "filial duty should take precedence of fraternal obligation." We have learned to prize our brotherhood. Would that we had learned it long ago. And now it is for us to say let us separate no more — let us pledge ourselves anew to each other and our common country, and be true to freedom henceforth and forever. We have found out our brotherhood, let us march together, step by step, from now.

Then we have learned another lesson which I pray we may never forget, viz., that *all the principles*

of our Republic are concentrated in the single principle of *Liberty and Union*. Upon this rock rests all that is worth preserving of our national existence. Take that away, and with it goes all that made it sacred to the hearts of our fathers. My mind runs back to-day along the line of our history to the time when true and noble men, from every State along the Atlantic slope, stood together around the counsel board of the father of our country. From North and South they came with one heart and one mind, and that alive with the sacred fire of liberty. But the serpent has wound his cold coil around the Palmetto tree since then, and put out that fire in the Southern heart. The watchword of that early time was "*Liberty and Union*," and I trust it echoes in our hearts to-day. But the motto of the South has changed to "*Slavery and Disunion*." I need not ask who stands nearest to the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution. The test is abroad to-day by which we may know who are still loyal and true. And we should have no hesitancy in branding him who denies and would tear down that motto of our fathers, as a traitor to his country. Let us insist that men shall take one side or the other in this hour of peril. Let us know who are our country's friends, especially those among us, for a traitor in the camp endangers all our homes. Now, if ever, with one heart and one voice, we must stand up for this motto. The principles for which it stands are what we must defend; at them this blow of despotism is aimed, and in them is involved our honor and our peace.



Another lesson that the hour is teaching us, is, that *our whole system of education must stand on the side of freedom*. Our children need to learn the value of our liberty. But we have been too much afraid of this. We have not taught our sons and daughters this first lesson. We have too long cherished the principles of freedom as the badges of heroes that are dead, rather than the working powers of every-day life. It should be with us a principle of duty, to imbue the hearts of our children with such a love of freedom, that no temptations could lead them astray. Nor should this instruction be confined to the male sex alone. It is true the women of our country do not participate directly in national affairs. But with the early training of our children, entrusted to their care, they wield an influence for government, compared with which the right of suffrage is small. Woman ought to be educated in the history and principles of our Republic, that she may teach them as early lessons to the young. If she tell her little son the story of our Revolution, will he ever forget it? If she impress upon his mind the great idea involved in that struggle, will he ever repudiate it? No, never. I would say, then, to every mother here to-day, and every mother in our country, in the language of the eloquent Story, "Teach your children as they climb upon your knees, or lean upon your bosom, the blessings of liberty. Swear them at the altar, as with their baptismal vows, to be true to

their country and never to forget or forsake her." So shall we elevate the sentiment of freedom in our States, and raise up loyal defenders of our rights. But our children have learned more of the worth of freedom in the week just passed, than they would have learned in our homes and schools for years. And, if I mistake not, this is equally true of ourselves. Terrible as this lesson is, perhaps it was needful to arouse us to a sense of our duty, and the worth of this invaluable inheritance. Only they who are compelled to struggle for their freedom can appreciate its worth. Those men whose hearts were tried with fatigue and famine and storm in the days of '76 — the men who saw their homes swept away, and their wives and children destitute—who lifted up their swords in the woods of Carolina and swore to surrender only to death — the men whose shoeless feet crimsoned the frozen earth at Valley Forge — those men would not forget the price of liberty or neglect to teach their children its worth. But we, the inheritors of freedom, who have paid nothing for the boon, are liable to forget its value. Let us heed this lesson of the hour, and kindle now upon our altars a new devotion to our country.

Another lesson, and the final one, for we must stop somewhere, is, *that the church should consecrate all its powers to freedom.*

I have no doubt that the churches of the North have spoken loudly for freedom to-day. It is an easy task, when the people demand it. There are



times when the pulpit is compelled to speak — when the pews would hardly tolerate its silence. But what has the pulpit done for freedom in the past? Has it spoken out on all occasions, and plead the cause of liberty? Alas! there has been a sad remissness of duty in that regard. The clergy of the North have not labored in that cause with the earnestness and zeal that such a cause demands. But they are not wholly to be blamed. In too many instances the people have compelled the ministers to be neutral on the great questions of the day. They have said, “thus far and no farther must you go.” A neutral minister, indeed! Why, such a man is only fit to preach to mummies. How could a neutral sermon kindle the fires of patriotic devotion, such a lack of which we see in our country to-day, or educate the people in the love of liberty? The pulpit professes to stand as God’s sentinel in the world, to watch and guard the interests of truth and humanity. It is, indeed, a great commission, but how can it be faithful to such high trusts, and neglect the cause of *freedom*. Freedom is the corner stone of God’s temple — freedom of body and soul. Without that, there can be no such thing as spiritual life and power. It seems to me that so long as the church winks at oppression in any place or form, it defeats its own mission in the world. To-day we are standing in the shadow of a mighty evil that has been gathering strength with each revolving year, to crush out our free institutions, and bring us under its power. It has ris-

en up at last in the guise of civil war, and demands our consent to its rule. Is there not a voice in this to the churches of the great free North? Do not the gathering clouds rebuke us for our sad neglect? Is there not a lesson for the future here? Yes, God calls us out of these events, henceforth to consecrate the church — its spiritual power, and moral strength, and all it has, to freedom. We cannot fail to read this lesson in this trying hour; would that we had learned it before the strong wind, the earthquake and the fire.

I have not time to speak further of these lessons now. A single word of our duties, and I have done. No eye but His to whom all things are known, can pierce the veil of coming days, and know what scenes shall be enacted before we come up to this temple again. Let us wait God's time to reveal it; but while we wait, let us keep our hearts steady and calm, and be ready for any sacrifice that the conflict may require. There will be times when we shall be lifted up with the assurance of victory, and times when we shall be depressed with fear of defeat. But let us trust in God and be patient, while we pray that He may be with us as He was with our fathers. Above all, let what will come, be not disheartened or yield a single principle of freedom.

Let this subject which has troubled us so long be settled now forever. Let us make an end of traitors and disunion. The struggle may be long, but let us not be satisfied with any doubtful result. Let us



leave no after-work for our children to do. Around those sacred altars, consecrated by the blood of heroes, were those pledges recorded which made us sons of freedom. Shall it now be said we are unworthy of the name?

“Pride of New England!  
Soul of our Fathers!  
Shrink we all craven-like  
When the storm gathers?  
What though the tempest be  
Over us lowering?  
Where's the New Englander  
Shamefully cowering?  
Graves green and holy,  
Around us are lying;  
Free were the sleepers all,  
Living and dying.

If we have whispered truth,  
Whisper no longer;  
Speak as the tempest does,  
Stearner and stronger;  
Still be the tones of truth  
Louder and firmer,  
Startling the haughty South  
With the deep murmur:  
God and our charters right,  
Freedom forever!  
Truce with oppression  
Never, no Never!









